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STUDY OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTAL PREFERENCES FOR THE CHOICE OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION OF CHILDREN: RESULTS FROM A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to know the preferences of parents towards management education and the choice of a management institution. The study also purports the factors and antecedents that go into selection of a B-School for their child. A focus group study was taken as a qualitative approach amongst the parents (both male and female) of children studying in a B-School in Bangalore. The students were mostly from various parts of India. The study showed that parents seek good faculty, good placements and social support for their wards and the infrastructure is secondary criterion. Parents seek good social support and want their children manage the diversity that is seen in the B-School. Study indicates a high collectivistic approach of the Hofstede framework, though on a long term, parents want their wards to take decisions individually and decide for themselves about their future. The implications of the study is that results are applied to the higher education with respect to management education, given that the focus group was limited to seven parents who had their wards studying in the B-School in Bangalore. The parent as a stakeholder can be delved into, assessments and reviews can be done from the parent's perspective too. This paper throws light on the underlying factors for parents that form the basis for choice of a B-School.

KEYWORDS

B- schools, parental influence, hofstede framework, focus group, management education.

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INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed a burgeoning growth of institutions of management education, thanks to the ever increasing demand for the courses for management. Apart from the universities a spate of institutions, both independent and private universities operate on a joint venture or a franchise based setup. As the choices are more, there is a pressing demand for a B-School to market itself. The level of involvement of the students, the time taken to decide given the various alternative choices, the placement processes makes marketing of a B-School more challenging. Added to it, as an initiative of the quality enhancement, many institutions comply or fine-tune their functioning to a host of accreditation organizations in the global level. Hence a B – School aspires itself to make itself a global management education provider. In this context, this paper perceives the management education from the perspective of an important stakeholder – the parent. The gender differences which were once skewed are reducing to a large extent with many institutions of repute like IIMs seeing more female students in their enrolments (Varma, 2019).

The influence of regional subcultures in India cannot be neglected. Language diversity exists people in the northern parts of India can converse easily in Hindi, whereas in the south it is not so. Although the formal communication is English, its use is limited in informal situations. Diversity also exists based on region of origin; people in minority based on the region of origin would feel as an outsider when working in a different origin as the culture, practices and language differ. Many such cases are seen of people belonging to the north east regions (Meena, Kavita, 2015). With more and more students willing to travel to different parts of the country, a business school in India is exposed to more diversity than the previous years.

According to Daft (2008), a stakeholder is groups within or outside the organization that has a stake in the organization performance. The satisfaction level of each group can be assessed as an indication of organization's performance. Studies have indicated that the major stakeholders for a B-School are students; faculty and corporate and minor stakeholders are society and government, administrative staff and media (Nargundkar, et.al, 2009).

IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH GAP

Various studies have been conducted to know the preferences towards management education. However, there are few research studies that explore the perspectives of management education from the parent's viewpoint. Added to it, the information level and the cognition of the parent may differ from the cognitions of other influencers like peers, other organizations, business surveys etc. In our study, we posit that parents form important stakeholders for the management institution. This paper, hence attempts to view the selection of a B-School from the parent's perspective.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Given that various socio-economic factors influence the parent's decisions for higher education of students, it is important to know their preferences towards choice of B-School. The study is to delve into the parents' opinions, their information search, involvement in the selection and the expectations from the B-School.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. Identifying the performance indicators used by parents for a B- School.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the various factors that parents consider in the choice of a higher education with specific reference to management schools.
2. To know the inclinations of parents specifically out station students with respect to diversity in the management institutes.
3. To examine the short run and long run perspectives of the parents for their children.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND THE STUDY

The study examined the Hofstede framework to know the different factors involved in the choice of business schools. One of the principle factors in the Hofstede framework is the individualism and collectivism. While individualism is a national cultural attribute that describes the degree to which people prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of a groups, collectivism is the national cultural attribute that describes a tight social framework in which people expect others in groups of which they are a part to look after them and protect them (Robbins et.al, 2012). Though Indian parents favour individual decisions, for crucial decisions like education, collectivistic approach is taken both by the student and the parent as well.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Study had been taken up on the career choice of the MBA students by Agarwala (2008). The influence of family members in making career choices were studied and it was found that students exhibited collectivism and father was the most influential family member.

A similar study by Kongolo and Imenda (2012) showed that parental opinion of choice of management institution is higher in traditional universities though marginally in comparison of two universities in South Africa, one being the traditional universities and the other being universities of technology.

Another study by Bodycott (2009) explored the factors that Chinese parents and children look for when going for higher education to the Western universities. The value system of China is that parent-child relationship is reciprocal in nature – parent would sacrifice a lot to get his child educated, in turn the child would give respect and take care of the parents. In spite of their struggling income, Chinese parents look for foreign education for their children because it is perceived that students with a foreign degree have better employability skills. The parents rated the following factors as important ones in deciding for an overseas education, employment prospects, migration possibilities, proximity to home, scholarships, and cost of the tuition, whereas the students rated the following factors as important: accommodation, English speaking environment, language support, different programs, international experience, relatives or friends in the area, emotional and social support.

Studies have been conducted by Wilcox et.al (2006) on the social support factors that make a student retain in a university namely: compatible friends, accommodation, academic support, location of the campus etc. Student friends' support, living arrangements are very crucial for social stay in a University, as per the study. Study by Chahal and Devi (2015) explored the importance of infrastructure in service failures and service recovery and found that infrastructure played a major role in service failures and service recovery.

Study by David et. al (2003) reflected the gender issues in parental involvement in children's choice of higher education. Based on the interviews with students and parents in UK, they found that students decided whether to involve their parents in the choice of higher education or not and girls were more collaborative than boys in the choice of higher education. Parental involvement differed in terms of gender, educational and social backgrounds and perceptions of institutional and familial habits. The article also purports that gender of the parent is important in the choice of university for the children.

Ivy (2008) studied the 7Ps of marketing mix for MBA marketing. In a study conducted amongst students of Graduate School of South Africa, the factor analyzed data indicated seven distinct marketing factors – people, promotion and price and four new factors namely: programme (the range of electives and range of minors), prominence of the institution, prospectus and premiums (accommodation, computer programs, class size, computer facilities, exchange programs) were important in student's selection of MBA colleges. Publicity and league tables in mass media also play an important role in choice of MBA College, the study concluded.

Similar study by Mutairi and Saied (2016) amongst the students of Kuwait universities revealed the abovementioned points. Students selected MBA program to improve their knowledge and skills, alumni, friends' suggestions and university websites were the main source of information about the colleges, overseas accreditation, university and faculty reputation, admission requirements were the important evaluation criteria of an MBA program.

Another study by Ng et.al.(2008) pertaining to the choice of career of MBA students taken by self-administered questionnaires amongst 109 students of a mid-sized university in USA revealed that people (both family and non-family) were not the predictors of career decisions of students. Students displayed more individualist attitude towards career choices, thus embarking on the individualism aspect of the framework given by Hofstede.

Alfattal (2017) took up a quantitative and qualitative study with 25 parents and 25 Chinese students regarding the preferences to study abroad. It was found that access, affordability and parent's encouragement were the important factors in the students' decision to study in USA.

In a study amongst 212 students of under graduation (135 private, 77 public) by Calvo-Porral et.al (2013) in Spain, using SERVQUAL scale, to assess the perceived quality in higher education, it was inferred that of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL scale, only the tangibility and empathy dimensions were most influential in assessing the service quality of an institution.

Beard et.al. (2009) found out that measures used at Kenneth W Montford College of Business used parent surveys and parent referrals while measuring the student and stakeholder satisfaction – the measure given by Malcolm Bardridge Award given in education.

Nargundkar et.al. (2009) studied the brand – building for B – Schools from various stakeholders' perspectives. They resolved that various literature show that student is a collaborative educational partner and they suggested the societal marketing orientation where by the primary function of a university is to address the goals of students, parents, government and society as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research is done to know the act of consumption rather than the act of buying. Consumer behavior, being a subset of human behavior, has to have an understanding of the consumer experiences. The interpretivist or post modernistic approach to consumer behavior assumes that it is not possible to have cause and effect relationship and that the consumption patterns are different (Schiffman et.al, 2007). One of the prominent methods of qualitative research is the focus group discussion. Focus group discussion was conducted for a period of about half an hour to 45 minutes in 2019 amongst the parents of wards studying in a B-School in Bangalore. The moderator /researcher allowed the parents to express their views, expectations and opinions regarding the B-School, its processes and the other requirements. Since some parents were comfortable in Hindi, they predominantly used Hindi in their views, all other used English. Four parents were mothers who expressed their concerns and who justified their choice of the B school as well. There were few working mothers who played a significant role in deciding the career choice of their children. Few of the parents had their children educated in under graduation in Bangalore. The moderator video graphed the focus group discussion and the transcripts were used for the study of the topic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the criteria for choosing a B – School for your ward higher education?
2. What is/are the most important factor that you consider for your ward to join a B-School?
3. What are your immediate and long term perspectives for your ward as a parent?

Though the research questions were posed, the parents went into the deep delving of the questions that were posed. As for the criteria that was required for choice of B – School, the postulates of Bodycott (2009) the employment opportunities, the migration, proximity to home, scholarships and cost of the tuition were reflected in the discussion. Parent sought good placement from the college for his child - in line with the previous studies by Shenoy and Aithal (2016). Added to it the location of the B-School is also an important choice criterion as per the discussion.

Research question 1and 2

Parent 1: I want good placement expected, achha knowledge deta hai, faculty should be good.

Parent 2: I wanted to get my daughter educated in Bangalore, my elder daughter works here, there are 180-200 companies in Bangalore, by which my daughter can get enough help and opportunities.

Parent 3: I went to Hyderabad, saw the B-Schools there, I searched the net, there are around 50,000 colleges in India, why I chose this B-School is though the campus is not so very large, the course offered is PGDM while other colleges have MBA, wide range of subjects (electives) are being given, honestly what I am looking for is the good faculty and the placements.

Parent 4: I think my son has to get a proper exposure, we talk about global village, global exposure, when they come out as managers, they would require a global perspective, when they come out of MBA. Whatever be the qualification, they would be jumping into the global market. I want him to specialize in different subjects, the college is near my place, and I have a limited budget.

Parent 6: In the college, education should be good, it should have a good transport, and there should be a good library, when we spent the money it should reflect in the placements

Parent 7: My concern was that how the college treats/reacts to average students because my daughter has a lot of things to improve on. The concern was not about placements, transport or infrastructure. It was about will my daughter be able to make a mark.

Research question 3

Parent 1: My son short term perspective for my son is he should develop skills pertaining to management as a long term perspective, 3-4 years in the industry, they should be able to face the real situation, they should not have a feeling that having an MBA degree will stop their education, they should keep learning.

Parent 3: I want my daughter to have a long term vision, not a short one, she should develop herself, achieve something, that's why I made her join here. I had seen different colleges; my daughter wrote CAT but I felt this is the right college for her.

Parent 4: Wider perspective is that my son should understand what he wants to do, where he wants to go. My son asked me to guide him, I said I am 50 years old, how can I guide you, you have to chart out a path to yourself. Do I chase money, position or work? You have to decide what you want to do.

Parent 6: What we didn't get, our children should get, they should take decisions by themselves, we should be known by their name.

Parent 7: As a short term perspective, my daughter should have the critical thinking ability up her sleeve, not going with one approach, which any manager would not like, but multiple approaches that would make her manage better, long term perspective is that she should have the ability to see what is good for her i.e. she should be able to judge if she takes a decision five years from now, how that would impact her for the next five more years.

Diversity is one challenge that the outstation student face when they enter a tier I city like Bangalore. This is in consistence with the view of Aithal and Sureshkumar (2016) and Meena K. (2015).

Parent 7: My main concern is that my daughter never moved out of her hometown, she lacks the mindset to face the diversity, the communication skills is also not good. My very first concern was she has to see people from different backgrounds, experience diversity.

Infrastructure was not an important criterion when weighed with the other criteria for choice of B- School.

Parent 4: I don't want a huge spacious campus. I had been to Delhi, Ghaziabad and seen large colleges with huge campus and wonderful canteens, but lectures would be going on one side and students would be loitering in the other. The students were looking for good malls and theatres nearby. But here the atmosphere is very business kind. My son said mom the place is quite small when compared to where I studied, why should I come here? I said; see you are coming here with a focus to study. I'm sure that my kid will go study and come back soon. I don't want my son to jump into the heat he has to understand what he is doing.

TABLE 1: DIMENSIONS THAT EMERGED FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Dimension	count
Placement	4
Knowledge	1
Good faculty	2
Location	1
Elective choice	2
Global experience	1
Ability to take decisions, develop critical thinking	6
Exposure to a college with students of diverse backgrounds	1

DISCUSSION FROM THE FOCUS GROUP

It was clear that the parents wanted good faculty, good teaching and good placements for their children. The choice of B-School depended on their budget and hence infrastructure was not an important determinant/criterion of selection, given that other factors assumed prominence. For almost all the parents, the ultimate aim of management education was their child's ability to take decisions or handle tough situations. Having English speaking friends, social support like accommodation, transport facilities were also given due significance. The other concern was that their children should be able to mingle with people with diverse backgrounds.

The focus group also indicated that though the decision was taken by the parent, few parents wanted the children themselves to decide which college is good for them, contrary to the fact that national culture of India follows a collectivistic framework of Hostede. Career choice being a crucial decision, parents wanted more self-indulgence and self-reflection on the part of their wards.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

While the discussions forayed into various topics of placements, faculty, infrastructure and support systems for a B-School, what cannot be neglected is the process that involves even the parents as a stakeholder. For e.g. parents can be given feedback and assessment forms, surveys and be a part of the other review process. The institutes can have more personal interaction with the parents that perhaps would increase the referrals for the B-School.

CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research confines to the qualitative method of parental involvement in the choice of B-School and is limited to one city. Studies however can be taken at the quantitative level with more parent respondents. Studies can extend to the employability, managing work force diversity and other culture related aspects of the B-School indicators. A comparative study can be taken of B-School in Bangalore and B-School of any other tier II city in India. Studies can be taken up with the other stakeholders such as companies, alumni of the college and faculty of the B-School.

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